

# श्री गणेश पुराणम् THE GAṆEŚA PURĀṆAM

भूमिका

डॉ० रामकरण शर्मा

(विरतसेवः) संयुक्तशिक्षामन्त्रयिता भारतशासने, प्रवर्तकनिदेशको राष्ट्रीय संस्कृत संस्थानस्य,  
कुलपतिः कामेश्वरसिंहदरभंगा-एवं सम्पूर्णानन्द-संस्कृत विश्वविद्यालययोः।



नाग पब्लिशर्स

११. ए. यू. ए., जवाहर नगर, दिल्ली-११० ००७ (भारत)

## INTRODUCTION

Śrīgaṇeśapurāṇa was, perhaps, first published in 1892 (Bombay, Gopāla Nārāyaṇa Press) in ms. form, as edited by Uddhavācārya Aināpure and Kṛṣṇa Śāstrī Pitrye. Gaṇeśagītā - a section of this Purāṇa was published in 1906 together with Nīlakaṇṭha's commentary Gaṇapatibhāvadīpikā (edited by the Paṇḍits of the Ānandāśrama) by Ānandāśrama Press, Poona.

This Purāṇa finds a first place in Gaṇeśa Grantha Section of the illustrious work Śrī Gaṇeśakośa (ed. Amarendra Gadgil, Śrīrāma Book Agency, Pune, second edition 1981).

The edition of the Purāṇa together with Marathi translation by V.S.S. Viṣṇuśāstri Bapat, published by Damodar Lakṣmaṇa Lele (Modavṛtta Chāpakhāna, Wai, 1905-6) was perhaps the first attempt to popularise this illustrious text on Gaṇeśa. This has also been long out of print.

Thus it is quite in the fitness of things that M/S Nag Publishers should have thought of

bringing out a reprint of Śrīgaṇeśa Purāṇa - one of the two Upapurāṇas (Mudgalapurāṇa being the other one) solely dealing with Gaṇeśa as the Supreme Divine Power.

The Gaṇeśapurāṇa itself describes itself as an Upapurāṇa :

अन्यान्युपपुराणानि वर्तन्तेऽष्टादशैव च ।

गाणेश नारदीय च नृसिंहादीन्यथापि च ॥ 1. 1. 8

It is, however not listed among the eighteen upapurāṇas mentioned in the Kūrmapurāṇas, as follows :

अन्यान्युपपुराणानि मुनिभिः कथितानि तु ।

अष्टादश पुराणानि श्रुत्वा सक्षेपतो द्विजाः ॥

आद्यं सनत्कुमारोक्तं नारसिंहमतः परम् ।

तृतीयं <sup>1</sup> स्कान्दमुद्दिष्टं कुमारैः तु भाषितम् ॥

चतुर्थं शिवधर्माख्यं साक्षान्नन्दीशभाषितम् ।

दुर्वाससोक्तभाष्यं नारदीयमतः परम् ॥

<sup>2</sup> कापिल वामनञ्चैव तथैवोशनसेरितम् ।

ब्रह्माण्ड वारुणञ्चैव कालिकाह्वयमेव च ॥

माहेश्वर तथा <sup>3</sup> साम्बं सौरं सर्वार्थसञ्चयम् ।

<sup>4</sup> पराशरोक्तं मारीचं तथैव भार्गवाह्वयम् ॥ <sup>5</sup>

Preceding pāda reads as नन्दिकेश्वरयुग्मञ्च

The variants noted in the footnote are from the śabda-kalpaduma which defines Upapurāṇa as "(उपमिनं पुराणेः) व्यासकृताष्टादशपुराणसदृशानामुन्यादि-प्रणीताष्टादश पुराणम्" and quotes the above verses with variants from "भक्तमासतत्त्वधूनकर्मपुराणम्". The lexicon also defines दैव as देवीपुराणम्. But the fact remains that neither the Venkateshvar press edition (Reprint, Nag Publisher, Delhi 1983) of the Kūrmapurāṇa nor the representative quotations therefrom as in the Śābdakalpadruma list Śrīgaṇeśa-Purāṇa as an upapurāṇa. M W has slightly different a version of the Kūrmapurāṇa's listing of the upapurāṇas as follows :

"Upa-purāṇam n. a secondary or minor Purāṇa (eighteen are enumerated; the following

1. वायवीयं च । 2. कापिलं वारुणं शाम्बं । 3. कल्की दैवं सर्वार्थसिद्धिदम् । 4. पराशरात्मपरं मारीचं भास्कराह्वयम् । 5. Verse 19 begins with नन्दिकेश्वरयुग्मं च ।

is the list in the Kūrma-Purāṇa: 1. Sanatkumāra. 2. Narasiṃha (fr. Nṛsiṃha). 3. Bhāṇḍa. 4. Śivadharmā 5. Daurvāsasa. 6. Nāradya. 7. Kāpila. 8. Vāmana. 9. Auśanasa 10. Brahmāṇḍa 11. Vāruṇa. 12. Kālikā-purāṇa. 13. Māheśvara 14. Sāmba. 15. Saura. 16. Pārāśara. 17. Mārīca. 18. Bhārgava)".

The above listing tallies with the one as in the Venkateshvar Press edition of the Kūrma-purāṇa except that the third upapurāṇa named here is *Bhāṇḍa* which could be a printing error for *Skānda*. There is no Vāyavya, no kalkī, no Daiva here.

Are we now to conclude that Śrīgaṇeśapurāṇa was not known to the author of the Kūrmapurāṇa? But the fact that at least the Gaṇeśagītā forming part of the Gaṇeśapurāṇa (as already available in print) was commented upon by Nīlakaṇṭha establishes the relative antiquity of this Purāṇa. Moreover, there is every reason to believe that Bhārgava and Gaṇeśa Purāṇas are one and the same, inasmuch as the extant text of the Śrīgaṇeśa Purāṇa represents a dialogue between the Trīkalajña Sage Bhṛgu and leprosy-

stricken king of Saurāṣṭra-Somakānta. So this Purāṇa may have earlier been named as Bhārgava Purāṇa.

Like the two Great Epics and Dharmaśāstra, the Purāṇas are also traditionally categorised as "Smṛti". Corresponding to the transmission of the various Śākhās of Śruti from generation to generation in the respective families, through oral tradition, the various Purāṇas/upapurāṇas were also perhaps orally transmitted from generation to generation in the families concerned. Some beginning has already been made in the direction of stylistic studies into the distinctive features of the Mahābhārata as an oral composition (Vide Sharma, Elements of poetry in the Mahābhārata, Berkeley 1964; Reprint, Delhi 1988). No such a study seems yet to have been made with regard to the Purāṇas in general or even a specific Purāṇa. It is unfortunate that except four or five Purāṇas that have been critically edited and brought out under the auspices of the All India Kashiraj Trust no critical editions of the Purāṇas or Upapurāṇas are yet available. Even the editions available are full of printing and other errors

(except the Śrīmadbhāgavatam).

To my mind a stylistic study with special reference to oral poetic technique as reflected in the Purāṇas and identification of the oft-repeated poetic formula in the Noun-adjective combination, similes, vocatives etc. should be since quite a long time for all further Purāṇic studies. That will enable us to determine the common core and distinctive features of a given Purāṇa / Upapurāṇa. That will also help us in determining the relative priority or posteriority of a Purāṇa.

As regards this Purāṇa, it must have attained eminence centuries earlier than Nīlakaṇṭha (16th cen.). According to R.C. Hazra "it cannot be dated earlier than 1100 A.D." On the basis of some internal and external evidence, he further concludes that "the date of the Gaṇeśa P. falls between 1100 and 1400 A.D."

As stated above, the Purāṇas too form part of our oral tradition. We can certainly try to determine the date of a text when it was standardised in the process of its oral evolution and was written down. But it is perhaps not possible to determine even approximately, the date of the

beginning of an oral tradition with regard to a particular text, specially when no critical edition representing the oldest available reading of the text is accessible to us. We can thus only conclude that the Gaṇeśa Purāṇas was written down long before the 16th cen. A.D., may be, between 1100 - 1400 A.D.

As usual, Gaṇeśa Purāṇa is also recited by Sūta in the naimiṣāranya in the course of the twelve-year sacrifice performed by Śaunaka. The sages have already grasped the eighteen Purāṇas. Now they request Sūta to recite other Purāṇas (anyāṇy api). So Sūta prefers to recite the first upapurāṇa dealing with Gaṇeśa. The order of transmission of this Gaṇeśapurāṇa is mentioned as Brahmā-Vyāsa-Bhṛḡu.

The central story starts with the depiction of virtues of the king of Devanagar in Saurāṣṭra-Somakānta by name.

Eventually Somakānta suffers from leprosy. Despite the appeals to the contrary from his ministers, subjects, family members, he desperately prefers to relinquish his throne. The unwilling son-Hemakaṇṭha is compelled to suc-

ceed him. Somakānta, together with his wife Sudharmā and the two ministers - Subala and Jñānagamyā quits his kingdom and ultimately reaches a beautiful forest. The king sleeps. The two ministers go somewhere in search for fruits etc. At that moment Sudharmā comes across a brilliant child on the bank of a pond and she relates the entire story of her husband's ailments to him.

The child is none else but cyavana himself who conveys the entire story to his father - Bhṛḡu. Somakānta is summoned to Bhṛḡu's hermitage. Being asked by the sage, somakānta tells him everything about himself as it happened in this life. The compassionate sage first starts telling him all that happened in Somakānta's previous life by way of determining the root cause of his present trouble.

Somakānta in his previous life was a Vaiśya-Kamanda by name. After his father's death, he became a wanton boy indulging in all sorts of undesirable activities; consequently his wife (kuṭumbinī) abandoned him. He went to a forest and started persecuting innocent passers by in-

cluding Brahmins. Once a Brāhmin, Guṇavadhana by name was caught by him. Guṇavardhana tried his best to invite his compassionate treatment towards himself. But Mātanga did not spare him even and thereby subjected himself to his infallible curse. When he was old, he repented for his misdeeds and tried to donate the entire plundered wealth to the deserving Brahmins. But none of them agreed to oblige him due to his unpardonable deeds of the past. He then spent his accumulation on the repair of an old deilepilated temple of Gaṇeśa. When he died and was about to be reborn, he was asked :

"What would you like to enjoy first—puṇya or Pāpa" ?

Mātanga preferred to enjoy puṇya first. So he enjoyed the royal honour, happiness, good health first. He has, thereafter, fallen a victim to the evil fruits of sinful acts in the form of leprosy in this birth.

Thus Bhṛḡu tells Somakānta all about his previous birth and continuity of the fruits of his misdeeds. Somakānta does not however, believe

in the story. At this, several birds start attacking him and eating his flesh. The sage, propitiated, however, saves the situation just through his Humkāra and the birds fly away. Somakānta is now fully convinced of the futility of his scepticism and falls at the feet of the sage and as advised by the latter has a dip in the pond. The sage also recites the name of Gaṇeśa one hundred and eight times and sprinkles the "mantrita" water on the king. Soon thereafter a monstrous Pāpapurūṣa comes out of the body of the king. The sage commands the Pāpapurūṣa to take shelter in a nearby tree. As soon as he enters the tree, it is burnt to ashes. The king is now free from ailments. The sage then advises him to listen to Gaṇeśapurāṇa and predicts that if he faithfully listens to him, slowly and gradually the fallen tree will start growing and as soon as it is grown up into a fullfledged tree, he will be absolutely free from all ailments. The sage further says that Vyāsa had originally obtained this story from Brahmā and that he was able to get it from Vyāsa himself. So at this stage Bhṛgu retales the story in the form of a dialogue between Brahmā

and Vyāsa. It is stated that as Brahmā started working on the eighteen Purāṇas without propitiating Gaṇeśa, he was not able to go ahead with his plans, (ओषधीभिश्च मन्त्रैश्च भगवोर्य इवाहिराट् । तस्तम्ये स्वात्मनि भृशं तदेतुं नाध्यगच्छत I.10.6) he approached Brahmā and sought his help. The Brahmā told him that all this happened due to the latter's negligence with regard to the propitiation of Gaṇeśa (स्मरणं वा गणेशस्य प्रारम्भं न्यस्य वा तथा । न कृतं च त्वया व्यास तेन भ्रान्तिस्तवाभवत् ॥ id. 25). So Bhṛgu repeats the Gaṇeśapurāṇa as originally recited by Brahmā to Vyāsa.

Somakānta, faithfully, listens to Gaṇeśapurāṇa ending with Vyāsas Gaṇeśa-worship and the consequential boon of omniscience. So the king is not only free from all his ailments but he also attains divinity and leaves for his divine abode by a divine Vimāna revisiting Devanagara - his former capital in Saurāṣṭra.

This is in a nutshell, the central theme of Śrīgaṇeśpurāṇam. As usual, there are, however, hundreds of episodes, subepisodes within episodes relating to Gaṇeśa as a Supreme Divine Being who alone is responsible even for distribu-

tion of work among the great divine Trio. There comes the story of Tripura Vadha, Madhukaiṭabha-Vadha, Paraśurāma, Kārtikeya and other well known and also not too familiar mythological figures. Gaṇeśa Sahasra nāma (I.46) Dūrvamāhātmya (I.62-67), and Śrīmad-Gaṇeśagītā (II.138-148) are undoubtedly of special religious significance. Several Gaṇeśa Festivals and Gaṇeśa Tīrthas are also mentioned throughout as part of the episodes.

The Gaṇeśa Purāṇa is divided into two Khaṇḍas, viz. Upāsanākhaṇḍa and Kṛdākhaṇḍa. The former consists of 92 chapters (4093 verses) while the latter, of 155 chapters (6986 verses). Taken all together, there are 11079 verses in this Purāṇa.

For a more comprehensive study and a detailed information about this Purāṇa in general and the tradition of Gaṇeśa worship in particular, I would like to invite the attention of readers to the two scholarly articles by R.C. Hazra, viz. The Gaṇeśa Purāṇa (Journal of Ganganath Jha Research Institute, Vol.X, pp. 72-99) and Gaṇapati worship and the Upapurāṇas dealing with it (id

Vol.V. Part 4 pp. 263-276) reprinted in Dr. R.C. Hazra Commemoration Volume (of the Purāṇa Bulletin) Part I (All India Kashi Raj Trust, Varanasi) pp. 211-242. One of the specially interesting points specially observed by Hazra is quoted below :

"By its directions that in Gaṇeśa-worship, the twenty-one names of this deity are to be recited (Gan. I. 46. 215-7 and 69.46f), that twenty one fruits (I.69.55) and twentyone twigs of Dūrvā grass are to be offered to Gaṇeśa (I.49.62, 69.46 and 87.8), that the worshipper is to go around the images of the deity twenty one times (I.49.62), that at least twentyone Brāhmins are to be honoured and fed on the occasion (I.51.45 and

87. 9-10), and that twentyone types of gifts are to be made to these Brāhmins (I.87.10) and that twenty-one coins (mudrāḥ) are to be given to the priest as his honorarium (dakṣinā) (I.87.7), the Gaṇeśa Purāṇa seems to regard the number twentyone" as a sacred one" (Commem. Volume pp. 228-9).

As a student of imagery in Sanskrit literature, I am specially enamoured of the imagery (both traditional poetic formulaic as well as original) as found in Gaṇeśapurāṇa. I hope, scholars will pay special attention, also to this aspect of this Purāṇa.

I take this opportunity to congratulate M/S Nag Publishers for bringing out this Purāṇa and

their assurances to bring out more and more Purāṇas and Upapurāṇas but for which we remain ignorant of our evergrowing great cultural Heritage.

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